

For Immediate Release
January 14, 2004

Contact: Senator Chuck Gross
573-751-8635
Rep. Barbara Fraser
573-751-4163

**SEN. CHUCK GROSS AND REP. BARBARA FRASER ANNOUNCE
INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AIMED AT PRESERVING
MISSOURI'S HISTORIC SHIPWRECKS**

JEFFERSON CITY -- In a joint press conference held today in Jefferson City, Sen. Chuck Gross, R-St. Charles, and Rep. Barbara Fraser, D-St. Louis, unveiled legislation they have filed that creates procedures which will preserve the hundreds of historic shipwrecks located in Missouri's waters.

Shipwrecks are located in every navigable waterway in Missouri ranging from the smallest rowboats to military vessels. Archeologists believe that as many as 600 steamboats alone may have wrecked on Missouri waters.

"These relics are not just a crucial part of Missouri's history, they are a valuable asset to the study of American history as a whole," said Gross. "For example, when steamboats were being manufactured in the 1800s it was rare for plans or diagrams to be drawn up. Master ship builders simply passed the knowledge down to their apprentices. If we allow these wrecks to be lost, part of our history will also be lost."

The bills introduced by Gross and Fraser would mandate that all historic shipwreck materials which have been abandoned on lands beneath navigable waters would belong to the State of Missouri, which is in line with the federal Abandoned Shipwreck Act of 1987. The Missouri Department of Natural Resources would be responsible for oversight of visitation, study and salvage of historic shipwrecks.

Before salvaging a shipwreck, positive identification of each shipwreck would be required, and those who want to search for a shipwreck must apply for a permit and identify the precise location of shipwreck. A permit holder would have one year to

demonstrate the precise location if the shipwreck has been found. If a shipwreck is not located, the permit holder must wait one full year before for applying for another permit.

Professional maritime archaeologists must apply for a research permit in order to perform any activity associated with a survey or research project.

The state would be prohibited from limiting visitation to shipwrecks unless threats were apparent from natural resources, the shipwreck site or visitors to the site.

Anyone who knowingly takes historic materials from a shipwreck or destroys or vandalizes a shipwreck is guilty of a Class A misdemeanor for the first offense and a Class D felony for the second or subsequent offense.

“Shipwrecks could be a significant tourist attraction if managed properly,” Gross said. “The Arabia Museum in Kansas City is an example of how a shipwreck can be renovated and turned into a beautiful museum that’s a real asset to the community.”

Constructed in 1853, the Steamboat Arabia wrecked in the Missouri River just outside Parkville in 1856. More than 130 years later, the boat was located, salvaged from the water and restored. Much of the steamboat’s cargo was rescued and is now on display.

“St. Louis is at the center of the two largest rivers in the country, and it has a rich riverboat history that largely goes unnoticed,” said Gross. “The boats that lay at the bottom of our rivers are an untapped part of our state’s history.”

Also on hand at the press conference was Dr. Steve Dasovich, head of the Archaeological Services Division of SCI Engineering, Inc.

Among SCI’s projects was the rescue of the Steamboat Montana, which sank in June 1184 near Bridgeton, after colliding with a railroad bridge.